

Water Resources Program

October 2009

The Department of Ecology (Ecology) has issued an interpretive policy statement clarifying that Washington residents can collect and store rooftop or guzzler collected rainwater for on-site use without having to go through the permit (water right) process of RCW 90.03.

A guzzler is a device used to catch and store rainwater to provide drinking water for wildlife, livestock or birds (see photo, right). They are built to provide adequate drinking water during critical periods of the year where natural watering sources are insufficient.

The new policy brings much needed clarity to rainwater collection that is lacking in the surface water code. Legislation has been introduced annually since 2002 to clarify the 1917 law, but regrettably none of the bills became law.

Rooftop/guzzler rainwater collection policy

The new rainwater policy clarifies that:

- A water right is not required for on-site storage and use of rooftop or guzzler collected rainwater; and
- Ecology may regulate the storage and use of subsequent new rooftop or guzzler collected rainwater harvesting systems if and when the cumulative impact of such new systems are likely to negatively affect instream values or existing water rights.

To qualify as rooftop collected rainwater, the roof collecting the rainwater must be part of a fixed structure above the ground with a primary purpose other than the collection of rainwater for beneficial use.

Monitoring large rainwater collection systems

Ecology is currently working with the State Building Code Council's Plumbing Code Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on amendments to the 2009 Uniform Plumbing Code (UPC). The draft TAG recommendations include a new section on rainwater collection that provides guidance and standards on rainwater systems, and notifies UPC readers of an Ecology registration form. Ecology believes this is a good way to track the larger systems because only the larger systems will involve a plumber familiar with the UPC. Ecology will not be tracking smaller, rain barrel type systems under the new rainwater policy.

Ecology intends to work with local governments involved with building permits associated with larger rainwater collection systems to inform them of this registration process. The department believes this new registration process and tracking system will facilitate an effective way to track the cumulative impact that larger rainwater collection systems may have on streams and groundwater supplies.

For more information

For more information on the Interpretive Policy Statement, please visit Ecology's website or contact Ecology's Kurt Unger (see sidebar).



Typical guzzler for small wildlife

For more information on the web

Ecology rainwater collection website:
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/hq/rwh.html>

Contact information

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